



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge**

**Contact:
Lucian Chalfen, Public Information Director
Arlene Hackel, Deputy Director
(212) 428-2500**

www.nycourts.gov/press

Date: November 14, 2018

Misdemeanor Court Tailored to Justice-Involved Veterans Opens in Queens

Queens, New York – Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today joined New York City Criminal Court Administrative Judge Tamiko A. Amaker and Queens County Criminal Court Supervising Judge Michelle A. Johnson to announce the start-up of a specialized part in Queens County Criminal Court tailored to veterans charged with misdemeanors who may be suffering from addiction, PTSD and other combat-related disorders.

The Queens Misdemeanor Veterans Treatment Court (QMVTC)—the second misdemeanor court for veterans to open in New York City—was created to divert appropriate cases involving veterans and active service members accused of low-level crimes, offering them substance abuse treatment and customized services in lieu of jail.

This latest problem-solving court, an outgrowth of the Queens County Criminal Court's Misdemeanor Treatment Court and Mental Health Recovery Court, was initiated by Queens County Criminal Court Judge Toko Serita. The new court is a collaboration of the New York State court system, Queens County's District Attorney's Office, Legal Aid Society-Queens County, Queens Law Associates, the Queens private and 18-B defense bar, EAC-TASC and the U.S. Dept. of Veteran's Administration.

All those arraigned in Queens County Criminal Court on misdemeanor charges who are identified as serving or having served in the U.S. military will be directed to the specialized

court, where they will be offered an opportunity to be evaluated by a representative from the U.S. Dept. of Veteran's Administration and the Court's clinical case management team.

Participants will be assessed to determine their eligibility for any additional veterans' benefits, including health care, housing benefits and educational aid. Clinical input from the Court's clinical case management team and the U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs will inform the duration of services. Upon successful completion of treatment and other court mandates, veterans may have their charges reduced or dismissed.

The QMVTC will be led by Judge Scott Dunn, formerly of the U.S. Air Force, and Judge Jeffrey Gershuny, a U.S. Army veteran.

"With the commemoration of Veterans Day this week, we are especially pleased to announce the addition of a misdemeanor court in Queens tailored to the needs of our military service members, who have made great sacrifices on behalf of our nation. This new court will address the underlying causes of criminal behavior, providing customized services and support to help justice-involved veterans and current military personnel who have substance use and co-occurring disorders get back on track. I commend the New York State court system's justice partners for their collaborative efforts on this important initiative," said Chief Administrative Judge Marks.

"In the Air Force, I served in an aeromedical evacuation unit. The unit was comprised of men and women devoted to the care and welfare of all soldiers. For me, the QMVTC team, a group singularly dedicated to the well-being of veterans and current military personnel involved in the criminal justice system, continues in that tradition. I am proud to preside in the QMVTC and look forward, along with the team, to ensuring that all veterans and current military personnel in the criminal justice system are treated honorably, respectfully and with the dignity that they have earned," said Judge Dunn.

"As a fellow veteran, I am profoundly honored and privileged to have the opportunity to preside in this Court and work with our QMVTC staff and stakeholders to provide unique opportunities, resources and treatment to current and former service members of our armed forces who are in need," said Judge Gershuny.

The QMVTC, which will initially operate on a pilot basis, is in the process of developing a peer mentor program. Peer mentors are military veterans who volunteer their time to offer justice-involved veterans support and motivation as they navigate the legal process and other challenges. The use of peer mentors has proven beneficial in veterans courts around New York and the nation.

There are now 35 veterans courts in New York State, seven of them in New York City. The new Queens misdemeanor court is the borough's second veterans court; its other veterans court, which operates out of Queens County Supreme Court, handles cases of military veterans charged with felonies.

#